



# VOUCHERS

## Where I Stand & Why

*Eleanor Holmes Norton*

### **Where Should Federal Money For D.C. Children Go?**

Two groups of D.C. kids qualify for the federal grants: our children in charter schools and our low-income students in transformation schools. The Mayor and Council have made sizable cuts in our schools this year. The Council even failed to vote pay raises public charter school educators are entitled to. Part of what was cut could be retrieved with federal grant funds.

### **With Fewer Students, will D.C. Public Schools Be Better Off?**

The most serious problem with the proposed vouchers has yet to be discussed or to be taken seriously. Our traditional public and charter schools will be hit hard financially if the predicted 2,000 students exit in the fall. Our public schools will lose a combination of \$12,557 per pupil in DC and federal funds because every school system must be funded on a per pupil basis. That would be a blow DC public school funding cannot afford today when it has already been cut.

### **Has Any Specific Money for Public Schools Been Proposed?**

Only \$10 million has been appropriated and that was for vouchers only. Cardinal Theodore McCarrick said, "As Archbishop of Washington, I have always believed that a stand-alone voucher bill will not adequately care for the educational needs of all of our city's children. We will only support legislation that helps all families in our city, including those with children at public schools."

### **Must D.C. Kids Without Vouchers Go To "Bad" D.C. Public Schools?**

I have always believed that a child is entitled to a public school alternative to a neighborhood school that does not work for that child. For decades D.C. has allowed children to choose schools elsewhere in D.C. In addition, D.C. leads the country in providing many alternatives to our public school system. Our extraordinary 42 charter schools are the most extensive in the country. They are the most important innovation in the history of public education here. However, their success has brought charter schools mile-long waiting lists and facilities in churches and other crowded facilities.

The best hope for our low income children are our trans-formation schools that surround these children and their parents with extra services, including tutoring for the children and special services for the parents are the closest thing to a breakthrough we have achieved. All 15 trans-formation schools have improved their Stanford 9 scores. The extra services these children get are available in none of the other D.C. public or private schools. These are our poorest children, often with the least motivated parents. The least any bill should do is to encourage and fund the improvements we see for the first time in these children. Instead, cuts will make it impossible to fund the extra resources that are producing these results or to expand transformation schools.

### **Where Does D.C. Stand?**

When the Congress tried to impose vouchers, the city preferred to see its appropriation vetoed, as it repeatedly was, rather than accept vouchers paid for with extra federal funding. These

resolutions went well beyond the insult of congressional riders. The city's resolutions, including those most recently adopted, specifically argued that federal money should be spent on publicly accountable schools.

### **Do Vouchers Work Better Than Public Schools?**

Although the proposed voucher program is called a "pilot," the results are already in on vouchers. The GAO study of the Milwaukee and Cleveland vouchers found no evidence of student gains. Ten years of independent, verified research of **public** and **private** voucher programs in Cleveland, Dayton, **D.C.**, New York, Chile, and New Zealand have shown no substantial academic gains.